DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 361 CS 510 388

AUTHOR Beals, Diane E.
TITLE Extended Discourse: Varying Opportunities for Young Children's Exposure to New Words.
PUB DATE 2000-08-16
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Discourse Analysis; Language Acquisition; *Parent Child Relationship; Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Vocabulary Development
IDENTIFIERS Conversation

ABSTRACT

Eighty-three preschoolers participated in toy play and mealtimes with their mothers. Different types of extended discourse were identified: fantasy world in toy play, and narrative and explanatory in mealtimes. Rare words (that preschoolers are not likely to know) were identified within extended discourse and within entire transcripts. The ratio of rare words per utterance found within extended discourse was similar to the ratio of rare words per utterance in the full transcript in toy play fantasy world talk and mealtime narratives. However, for mealtime explanatory talk, the rare word ratio was larger in extended discourse than in the full transcript, suggesting that different types of extended discourse offer variable opportunities for children to talk about words they may not know. Contains 35 references and 5 tables of data. (Author/RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 445 361

Extended Discourse: Varying Opportunities for Young Children's Exposure to New Words

(Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April, 2000)

Diane E. Beals
University of Tulsa
School of Education
600 S. College Avenue
Tulsa, OK 74145

phone: (918) 631-2045

e-mail: diane-beals@utulsa.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Under review (do not cite)

8/16/00

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Beals
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2B

Running Head: EXTENDED DISCOURSE

Abstract

Eighty-three preschoolers participated in toy play and mealtimes with their mothers. Different types of extended discourse were identified: fantasy world in toy play, and narrative and explanatory in mealtimes. Rare words (that preschoolers are not likely to know) were identified within extended discourse and within entire transcripts. The ratio of rare words per utterance found within extended discourse was similar to the ratio of rare words per utterance in the full transcript in toy play fantasy world talk and mealtime narratives. However, for mealtime explanatory talk, the rare word ratio was larger in extended discourse than in the full transcript, suggesting that different types of extended discourse offer variable opportunities for children to talk about words they may not know.

CS 510 388

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Extended Discourse: Varying Opportunities for Young Children's Exposure to New Words

The statistical links between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension have often been taken for granted, without serious theorizing of the connection. Anderson and Freebody (1981), in their widely-cited review of the research on these links, outlined three possible explanations. The first view they call the instrumentalist position, which emphasizes that knowing what words mean enables comprehension. This view, according to Anderson and Freebody, ignores the source of word learning, and states only that possession of a large vocabulary has a causal link to reading comprehension. The second position, the aptitude hypothesis, is that a person who has high vocabulary and comprehension scores has greater mental ability overall. Vocabulary knowledge, then, is reflective of verbal ability which allows one to comprehend text, but there is no suggestion as to how they work together. The knowledge hypothesis is the third position; it suggests that vocabulary knowledge is a reflection of one's knowledge of and experience with the culture, which is crucial for text comprehension. The knowledge view emphasizes conceptual frameworks, or "schemata" (Bartlett 1932), in which individual word meanings are interrelated to other words and their meanings.

This third position holds great promise for understanding what it is children do when they learn a new word. The link between individual words and longer stretches of discourse lies in the networks of meaning that we construct and reconstruct throughout our lives in our interaction with others, in our "effort after meaning" (Bartlett 1932:20). Words are not stand-alone mental objects that have some abstract semantic content. According to Bakhtin (1981:282), words are actively understood as they are assimilated into a "new conceptual system, that of striving to understand" through a "series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances" among words. It is in interaction (either oral or written) with others that children and adults are exposed to words in the context of everyday life and make connections between what they already know and make inferences about meanings of new words.

In the following example, we see a three-year-old, Tommy, in a conversation with his mother about something pertinent to a child his age, monsters (# indicates a pause, xxx indicates unintelligible material).

Example 1 (Tommy, age 3)

*Mother:	there aren't a real lot of wild animals here.
*Tommy:	no # but if we see a whole bunch um I would waked up.
*Tommy:	and when I waked up there will still be there.
*Mother:	think so?
*Tommy:	mmhm.
*Tommy:	because I see them when I'm asleep [/] when I was asleep I [/] my dreams xxx.
*Mother:	yeah.
*Mother:	when you're asleep sometimes your dreams are very real.
*Mother:	but it's just your imagination working while the rest of you sleeps.
*Tommy:	mommy mommy?
*Mother:	what?
*Tommy:	my dreams did come true.
*Mother:	no?
*Tommy:	it did.
*Mother:	it did? what was your dream about?
*Tommy:	it was a monster and I was xxx with his tongue it # mom his [/] his whole xxx and he dropped me on my neck.
*Mother:	the monster grabbed you on your head but that didn't come true no monster really grabbed you on your neck.
*Tommy:	it did come true.
*Mother:	it did?
*Mother:	when?

*Tommy: a long time ago.
*Mother: yeah?
*Tommy: and it jabbed me in the eye.
*Mother: it did?
*Tommy: mmhm.
*Mother: no honey it didn't come true.
*Tommy: mmhm.
*Mother: you know I would never let any monsters get you.
*Mother: besides what did I tell you about monsters?
*Tommy: what?
*Mother: they're only make believe and they only live in movies because somebody with a wonderful imagination makes up monsters.
*Mother: and all other sort of special effects to make the really scary monsters you know like how you watch Michael Jackson?
*Mother: and they show him putting his makeup on for "Thriller"?
*Mother: that's just because somebody had a great imagination.
*Tommy: mmhm.
*Mother: but no there's no such things as monsters.

In attempting to easy Tommy's fears about monsters, she uses the word "imagination" to help him understand where monsters come from, that he really need not fear them since they are "only make believe". Her explicit connection to another experience they had shared, viewing a video program about the making of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" music video, seems to be intended to show how monsters are made up by people with "wonderful" and "great" imaginations. So neither imaginations nor their products (in this case monsters) need be feared. This discussion uses the word "imagination" three times allowing Tommy the opportunity to hear it in an appropriate and meaningful (to him) context. He can make new conceptual connections between the idea of imagination, the world of make believe, dreams, and monsters, and a specific example of imagination in the music video "Thriller".

Despite conflicting theories of how young children learn new words -- do they have hard-wired constraints that allow them to organize the incoming information or are they able to use their social and cultural knowledge to make sense of the word? -- all theories of vocabulary acquisition assume that young children must hear a word used in the context of conversation in order to acquire at least some sense of the word's meaning (Beals 1997). Anderson & Freebody's knowledge position focuses on the ways that human beings organize information coming from the physical and social world around them. An important area of study is then the form that conversations take that are helpful to children in learning words.

In a study of the use of rare words (words considered to be unusual in the vocabulary of a preschooler) in mealtime conversations of families of three-, four-, and five-year-olds (Beals 1997), I have shown that words used in informative ways are positively correlated with children's age 5 and age 7 Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised (PPVT-R) scores (Dunn & Dunn 1981). In about two-thirds of the cases of rare word use in the course of 160 conversations, families provided information about the word's meaning via physical context (indicating a demonstration or the presence of an object or action), social context (pointing to social norms or violations of norms), prior knowledge (calling on past experiences or general knowledge), and semantic support (giving some direct verbal semantic information). The remaining uses were considered to be uninformative. While the informative use of rare words was predictive of later vocabulary scores, noninformative use was not. This study suggests that young children can indeed learn new words used in the course of informative conversation.

Important questions emerge: what kinds of conversation are most useful for learning new words? Are some settings more likely to be supportive of vocabulary growth than others? And in these settings, are there ways of talking that are more informative for learning new words than others? The working hypothesis of this paper is that some ways of talking in different conversational settings will promote the growth of vocabulary more effectively than others. I will use the term extended discourse to refer to these

ways of talking, because it requires that talk (or text) sustain a topic over a number of turns, utterances, or sentences.

Talk between parents and children can take many forms, but one type that has been shown to have both cognitive and linguistic benefits is a type of talk that Sigel (Sigel 1981, 1982; Sigel & McGillicuddy-Delisi 1984) calls parental distancing behavior and Snow calls decontextualized talk (Snow 1983, 1991) or extended discourse (Snow & Kurland, 1996). In this sort of talk, the parent talks in ways that allows the child to distance herself from the immediate present, to represent mentally some other place and/or time. This sort of talk places not only cognitive demands on the child in order to comprehend and produce it, but it also makes linguistic demands on the speaker to be more explicit about people, places, objects, events, and the relations among them. Because the topic is not necessarily present in the immediate social and physical context, the speakers must make assumptions about what the listeners know and what they are thinking about at the moment of conversation. Both Sigel and Snow and their colleagues (Beals 1997; Beals & De Temple 1993; Beals & Smith 1992; Beals & Tabors 1995; De Temple & Snow 1996; Sigel 1982; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Hemphill, & Goodman 1991; Snow et al 1996) have demonstrated the relationships between children's exposure to such talk and their cognitive and linguistic skills.

There are a number of crucial interrelated features to extended discourse. First, extended discourse requires paying attention to the needs of the audience. Bakhtin (1986) refers to the addressivity of utterances: speakers are always responding to utterances previously spoken and in anticipation of the potential responses of their listeners. Discourse is then constructed by speakers from what they assume the point of view of the listener to be. Another audience need that speakers take into consideration is how much knowledge they have in common with their listeners in order to gauge how much detail and explicitness to provide in the course of discussing a topic (Snow et al 1996). Listeners in conversation are able to provide feedback to the speaker, by asking clarifying questions or by facial expressions. Writers also have to gauge their audience's knowledge, but without benefit of such immediate feedback, although effective writers focus on their perception of the audience's need for level of explicitness and detail. Closely related to the recognition of audience knowledge and needs is another feature of extended discourse, monitoring the audience's responses. The speaker monitors how effectively his talk or text is in meeting the audience's needs, both in terms of the amount of information needed (Snow et al 1996), and in terms of preparing a response to the content of the interlocutor's utterance(s) (Bakhtin 1986). This allows the speaker or writer to recognize when he is not connecting well with the listener or reader, and to revise his discourse in order to get his point across.

Another aspect of extended discourse is its structure. Discourse comes in a variety of genres, each with its own purposes, demands, and affordances (Bakhtin 1986; Snow et al 1996). In written discourse there is frequently a common structure that aids the reader in comprehending the text by allowing her to predict and recognize relationships within and across sentences. Much work has been done identifying structures of various types of children's narrative genres (e.g., Hicks 1990, 1991; McCabe & Peterson 1985; Michaels 1981; Peterson & McCabe 1983, 1991) and others have studied more expository genres (e.g., Barbieri 1991; Barbieri, Colavita, & Scheuer 1990; Beals 1993; Beals et al 1994; Pappas 1993). While written discourse is more likely to demonstrate the usual structure of a genre, conversational discourse is messier in form and sequence, but generally the kinds of information found in the written forms are found in the conversational genres as well.

Comprehending and producing extended discourse is an important skill for children to acquire. Much of talk that goes on school requires sustaining a topic over numerous utterances or sentences, assuming that the audience does not share the same knowledge that the speaker does, planning for and meeting the audience needs, and talking in the expected formats of the classroom. Such talk also requires a reasonably-sized vocabulary in order to sustain talk about a topic. Children need to learn how to handle extended discourse and the vocabulary to sustain it.

In earlier work, Beals & Tabors (1995) found that the frequency of rare word use varied by conversational settings even with the same conversational partners. For example, in elicited reports (in which mothers elicited from their preschool-age children a story of some event they participated in together), few rare words were used by both mothers and children, perhaps due to the high demands of the

task on the young child to produce both an interesting topic with all the information and structure to make the telling interesting. The use of rare words in this context (when the children were three), however, was still predictive of the age-5 vocabulary scores, perhaps because the use of rare words was embedded in a conversation about an event that was particularly meaningful to the child. In a toy play situation, both mothers and children used more rare words, suggesting that toy play is a highly supportive context for the use and uptake of new vocabulary; correlations found between rare word use in toy play and larger vocabularies (as measured by PPVT scores) provides evidence for this. In a mother-child book reading situation, rare words were used frequently, varying by the book read. However, rare word use in book reading did not predict later vocabulary size, perhaps because the book's use of rare words generally drove rare word use, rather than mothers' or children's interest or knowledge. In overall mealtime conversation, the frequencies for mothers' and children's use were even higher, although many of these words might well be related to the task at hand, i.e., the consumption of asparagus, broccoli, and cantaloupe. A more potent source of rare words seems to be during explanatory talk (a form of extended discourse) in mealtimes, when children, in some explanations, were asking for definitions of words (e.g., "what does 'your highness' mean?").

It appears from this study that conversational situations do vary in their ability to predict later vocabulary size. Some settings have greater opportunities for some ways of talking than they do for others. Because situations vary in their purposes and, thus, in the genres used for extended discourse within them, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that conversational settings will also vary in their opportunities for participants to learn new words. The purpose of this study is to examine the amount of extended discourse and rare words used in two different interactional situations.

In this paper, I address the following questions: (1) how often do rare words appear in extended discourse, and (2) do rare words appear more frequently in extended discourse than they do in the conversational settings of the discourse overall, indicating a rich situation for word learning? To address these questions, conversations between mothers and their preschool-age children in family mealtimes and toy play situations were analyzed for the presence of specific types of extended discourse and the presence of rare words. The working hypothesis is that rare words will appear in greater proportion in the extended discourse of each situation than in all the talk in the situation.

Method

Corpus

The data for this study are drawn from a corpus developed by Catherine Snow and David Dickinson's Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development (Snow, 1991; Dickinson & Tabors, in press). The study followed 83 children from their preschool years through the elementary grades. With the focus on identifying oral language situations and environments that were predictive of later language and literacy skill, the study collected a number of types of conversation at home between mothers and target children at ages 3, 4, and 5. These included toy play situations, in which the experimenter provided a set of toys and asked the mother and child to play together for a few minutes. At the end of the age 3, 4, and 5 home visits, experimenters left a blank tape and tape recorder and asked the mother to record a typical family mealtime. The experimenter returned later to collect the tape and recorder. Each year, only some families followed through on recording a mealtime (64 at age 3, 45 at age 4, and 51 at age 5).

Subjects. The subjects in the study were from low-income families in the greater Boston area. Of these families, about one third were African-American, Hispanic, or other racial minority. While toy play included only mother and child, mealtime conversations usually included more than just the mother and target child. Many families had siblings or other children present. Fathers were present in 52 of the mealtimes of the 160 mealtimes. Some families included other adults; for example two families consisted of the mother, child, and grandparents.

Data analysis

Each recorded conversation was transcribed according to Codes for Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHAT) conventions laid out by the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) (MacWhinney &

Snow 1990; MacWhinney 1995). Table 1 presents the number of transcripts of each situation at each home visit.

Insert Table 1 about here

Each transcript was then analyzed on two dimensions: first, for the presence of a specific kind of extended discourse based on the situation, and, second, for the presence of rare words. Computer analysis of the transcripts was accomplished by using Child Language Analysis (CLAN) programs of the CHILDES project.

Extended discourse. Transcripts from each conversational setting were coded for the presence of a particular type of extended discourse that emerged within the affordances and constraints of the situation. In toy play, mothers and children would sometimes use fantasy world talk (Tabors 1995), in which they constructed an imaginary scenario, taking them away from the immediate present time and space (see Example 2; in each example the target child's name and age is given; (# indicates a pause, xxx indicates unintelligible material).

Example 2: Toy play fantasy world talk (Tyler, age 4)

(Tyler dials toy phone, puts on fire hat)
*Mother: who are you?
*Tyler: fire man xxx.
*Mother: hello? fire chief?
*Mother: just a minute.
*Mother: special emergency for the fire chief.
*Tyler: hi. oh.
*Tyler: there's emergency?
*Mother: what happened?
*Mother: hello?
*Tyler: hi.
*Mother: yes you have a fire down fourth and Maple.
*Tyler: oh.
*Mother: we need the fire engines right away.
*Tyler: (o)kay. I'm comin(g). (hangs up phone)
*Tyler: here's my thing to spray the fire out. (picks up block)
*Mother: all right.

All mealtimes were coded for the presence of explanatory talk, in which speakers seek to explain something, making explicit some connection between objects, events, concepts, or propositions (causal, intentional, descriptive, definitional, etc.; Beals 1993) (see Example 3), and narrative talk, in which speakers talk about some past event or plan for a future event (Beals & Snow 1995) (see Example 4). All of these kinds of talk share the feature of allowing the child to distance herself from the present time and space, to represent some other place and/or time.

Example 3: Mealtime explanatory talk (Kurt, age 5)

*Mother: come on I want you to eat chicken too.
*Sister: yes your highness.
*Mother: I'm not your highness I'm your mother.
*Sister: (laughs) yes you are my highness.
*Kurt: mommy?
*Kurt: what's your highness mean?

*Mother: somebody who's really really important.
*Mother: a queen and a princess or something.
*Mother: or a king.
*Mother: I think it's a king.

Example 4: Mealtime narrative talk (Megan, age 3)

*Mother: (laughs)
*Sister: what did you say?
*Mother: (laughs) what Jennifer?
*Sister: what did he do?
*Mother: nothing Dad asked me for something and I found it amusing.
*Megan: um. (laughs)
*Mother: well he asked you for something he told you to throw the bun at him.
*Father: unhuh.
*Father: only when I'm asking for it.

Table 2 presents the percentage of talk that each type of extended discourse accounted for overall in the full transcripts. Mealtime explanatory talk and narrative talk each accounted for roughly 15 percent of the mealtime conversations (some was overlapping; see Beals et al 1994), while fantasy world talk made up roughly 30 to 40 percent of toy play conversations.

Insert Table 2 about here

Rare words. Rare words are defined as words not likely to be found in the vocabulary of a preschooler. In order to identify rare words, a complete list of all words used in each situation's set of transcripts was generated. From this list, all words from the Chall and Dale (1995) list of 3000 common words and their inflections were removed. (These common words are ones whose meanings are known by fourth graders. Inflections such as plural and past tense were added to the 3000 resulting in a list of 7881 words.)

After removing all common words, the remaining lists was further edited, removing a set of words not considered rare including: proper nouns; exclamations, conversational markers, and expletives; forms of address; child reduced forms; slang, dialectical forms, and incorrect forms; and child culture terms. (See Beals & Tabors 1995, for a full explication of the process.) The resulting lists contained words which would be considered rare in the vocabulary of three-, four-, and five-year-olds. (See Examples 2 through 4 for uses of rare words (underlined) in the different types of extended discourse.)

There were 555 different rare words found in the toy play conversations, and 1129 in the mealtime conversations. The varying sizes of each list can be at least partially explained by the different affordances and constraints of each situation. Toy play had fewer different rare words than mealtimes. This is likely due to the fact that there was a limited set of objects that the mother and child were focusing on. Mothers and children used their imaginations when creating fantasy worlds, so this opened up the possibility of more rare words being used. Mealtime, on the other hand, was a much more open, free-wheeling type of conversation, with relatively few constraints on topic and, thus, rare words. In other work, mealtimes have had a greater number of different rare words (Beals et al 1995), but in this study, a shorter list was used that excluded food words as they did not appear to be unknown by the target children (Beals 1997).

Rare word use in extended discourse. Once the rare word lists were refined, they were used to identify rare word use in each full transcript. Then use of rare words was identified in only the extended discourse type appropriate for each situation for each transcript. This resulted in frequencies of rare word use for each mother-child dyad in each transcript overall and in extended discourse in each situation. From these two measures, a ratio of rare words used in the full transcript to utterances in the full transcript was computed. And a similar ratio in extended discourse was computed: rare words used in extended discourse

to utterances in extended discourse. These two ratios provide a measure of density of rare use within the interactional setting. Repeated measures ANOVA was used to indicate if these proportions varied significantly from each other.

Results

Frequencies and ratios

The results of this analysis for fantasy world talk in toy play are presented in Table 3. In the age 4 toy play transcripts, the average mother-child dyad used a significantly greater ratio during fantasy world talk (0.050) than during all talk (0.042) (in a repeated measures ANOVA, $F(1,70)=6.55$, $p<.013$). However, there was no difference between the ratios for fantasy world talk and full transcript at ages 3 and 5.

Insert Table 3 about here

Mealtimes presented opportunities for families to have conversations about a wide range of topics. During these meals, conversations included explanations and narratives. Two separate analyses were performed for each. Rare-word-to-utterance ratios at each full mealtime transcript ranged from 0.077 to 0.086 (see Table 4). But rare-word-to-utterance ratio were greater within explanatory talk on average than in mealtime talk overall, ranging from 0.104 to 0.125 at ages 3, 4, and 5) (repeated measures ANOVA, age 3: $F(1,63)=5.60$, $p<.021$; age 4: $F(1,43)=9.69$, $p<.003$; age 5: $F(1,48)=9.98$, $p<.003$).

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here

As Table 5, shows, however, mealtime narrative rare word-to-utterance ratios were not significantly different from the overall mealtime ratios.

Discussion

The two speech situations presented in this study have distinct sets of purposes, possibilities, and constraints. Thus, each has different types of extended discourse, which, in turn, has different relationships to the child's exposure to and engagement with rare vocabulary words. In toy play, mothers and children engaged in the construction of a fantasy world. When given a set of toys and asked to play together, a large proportion, an average of about 40 percent, of the talk was about another time, another place made up by the participants. However, only at the age 4 home visits was the ratio of rare words to utterances in fantasy world talk greater than the ratio of rare words to utterances overall.

A very different situation is mealtime. Mealtime conversations were not structured by the requests of an experimenter, but by the families' routines for getting through dinner. Two different types of extended discourse were observed in mealtimes: narrative talk, in which speakers tell about an event that has occurred or will occur at some other time or place, and explanatory talk, in which speakers clarify some connection between objects, events, words, or concepts.

In mealtime narrative talk, the rare-words-to-utterance ratios for narrative talk compared to overall mealtime talk was not significantly different from the full transcript ratio for any of the three mealtimes. The talk in narratives is about a situation that has taken (or will take) place some other place and time. While this requires the child to think beyond the immediate present, apparently it does not require a large number of rare vocabulary words do so. Often with children as young as three, four, and five years old, the topics of these stories are quite familiar.

While still a part of the same mealtime conversations analyzed for narrative talk, explanatory talk appears to be a specialized domain for providing children with exposure to and practice with the use of rare words. Unlike both toy play fantasy world talk mealtime narrative talk, the rare-words-to-utterance ratio was greater in explanatory talk than in the full transcript at all three mealtimes, on average. This demonstrates a clear pattern of the affordances of explanatory talk in contrast to the other two types of extended discourse examined here. The intent of explanation is to make some kind of verbal connection

between concepts, actions, objects, and words, so it seems reasonable to find that explanatory talk will be rich input for children's word learning.

Conclusion

Explanatory talk with young children appears to be fertile ground for acquisition of new words. By the very nature of explanatory talk itself, it seeks to bring the interlocutors into new understandings, new connections among propositions, concepts, and words, it is natural territory for children to engage in vocabulary and conceptual development.

Individual words and the discourses in which they are used are crucially intertwined; we cannot theorize discourse development and word learning separately. Anderson & Freebody's (1981) knowledge position, discussed at the beginning of this paper, points to the cultural knowledge one brings to extended discourse (both oral and written) that allows for comprehension, (and, I contend, production) of discourse, and the learning that takes place as a result of this comprehension. Comprehension is enabled by the interconnections of words, concepts, objects, and events, already existing in the listener's or reader's consciousness, and consists, at least in part, of making new connections with new words. Words are related to each other in "a series of complex interrelationships" (Bakhtin 1981:282), because they are heard or read as embedded in text and context. This embedding often reflects the connections between words, concepts, objects, and events. The frame or genre of the discourse, especially explanatory talk in mealtimes as indicated in the present study, confronts the schema of the mind, resulting in a new understanding of the word and a reconstruction of the backdrop of all of the experiences and knowledge the child has encountered and made his own (Beals 1998).

Children (and adults) appropriate words and word meanings from others around them, through discourse, the interaction between speaker and listener (or writer and reader). Bakhtin (1981: 293-294) reminds us:

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, on other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own.

Words, therefore, are learned in active, everyday discourse with others. Explanatory talk provides opportunities for children to hear the intentions and the accents of others using new words around them, and to take possession of the words. With a sustained topic to work through and a generic form to suggest what kinds of information are needed, explanatory talk allows the speaker to move away from the immediate present and recognize, adjust for, and monitor success in meeting the listener's needs to understand. Because in explanatory talk, speakers do not assume that the hearer knows everything they know, the genre provides a frame for passing on the needed information. While the child may not capture the full dictionary definition of the word, she can and does appropriate some sense of the word for her own use from the extended discourse.

References

Anderson, R.C. & Freebody, P. (1981). Vocabulary knowledge. In J. T. Guthrie (Ed.) Comprehension and teaching: Research reviews, pp. 77-116. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). The dialogic imagination. M. Holquist (Ed.), C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1986). Speech genres and other late essays. C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Ed.), V. McGee (Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas.

Barbieri, M. S. (1991). The origin of explanations. Contributi di Psicologia, 4, 153-176.

Barbieri, M. S., Colavita, F., & Scheuer, N. (1990). The beginning of the explaining capacity. In G. Conti Ramsden & C. Snow (Eds.) Children's language, Vol. 7, pp.245-272. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bartlett, F.C. (1932). Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beals, D. (1993). Explanatory talk in low-income families' mealtime conversations. Applied Psycholinguistics, 14, 489-513.

Beals, D. (1998). Reappropriating schema: Conceptions of development from Bartlett and Bakhtin. Mind, Culture, and Activity, 5(1), 3-24.

Beals, D. (1997). Sources of support for learning new words in conversation: Evidence from mealtimes. Journal of Child Language, 24, 673-694.

Beals, D. & De Temple, J. (1993). Home contributions of early language and literacy development. In D. Leu & C. Kinzer (eds.) Forty-second Yearbook of the National Reading Conference (pp. 207-215). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Beals, D. & Smith, M. (April, 1992). Eating, reading, and pretending: Predictors of kindergarten literacy outcomes. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

Beals, D. & Snow, C. (1994). "Thunder is when the angels are upstairs bowling": Narratives and explanations at the dinner table. Journal of Narrative and Life History, 4, 331-352.

Beals, D. Tabors, P. (1995). Arboretum, bureaucratic, and carbohydrates: Preschoolers' Exposure to Rare Vocabulary at Home. First Language, 15, 57-76.

Chall, J. & Dale, E. (1995). Readability revisited: The New Dale-Chall readability formula. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

De Temple, J. & Snow, C. (1996). Styles of parent-child book-reading as related to mothers' views of literacy and children's literacy outcomes. In J. Shimron (Ed.) Literacy and education: Essays in honor of Dina Feitelson (pp. 49-68). Hampton Press.

Dickinson, D. & Tabors, P. (in press). Building literacy with language: Young children learning at home and in school. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Dunn, L. M. & Dunn, L. M. (1981). Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised (Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service).

Hicks, D. (1990). Narrative skills and genre knowledge: Ways of telling in the primary school grades. Applied Psycholinguistics, 11, 83-104.

Hicks, D. (1991). Kinds of narrative: Genre skills among first graders from two communities. In A. McCabe & C. Peterson (Eds.) Developing narrative structure, pp. 55-87. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

MacWhinney, B. (1995). The CHILDES Project: Tools for analyzing talk, Second edition. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

MacWhinney, B. & Snow, C. E. (1990). The Child Language Data Exchange System: An update. Journal of Child Language, 17, 457-473.

McCabe, A. & Peterson, C. (1985). A naturalistic study of the production of causal connectives by children. Journal of Child Language, 12, 145-159.

Michaels, S. (1981). "Sharing Time": Children's narrative styles and differential access to literacy. Language in Society, 10(3),423-442.

Pappas, C. C. (1993). Is narrative "primary"? Some insights from kindergartners' pretend readings of stories and information books. Journal of Reading Behavior, 25(1), 97-129.

Peterson, C. & McCabe, A. (1983). Developmental psycholinguistics: Three ways of looking at a child's narrative. New York: Plenum Press.

Peterson, C. & McCabe, A. (1991). Linking children's connective use and narrative macrostructure. In A. McCabe & C. Peterson (Eds.) Developing narrative structure, pp. 29-53. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sigel, I.E. (1981). Social experience in the development of representational thought: Distancing theory. In I. E. Sigel, D. M. Brodzinsky, & R. M. Golinkoff (Eds.), New directions in Piagetian theory and practice, pp. 203-217. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sigel, I.E. (1982). The relationship between parental distancing strategies and the child's cognitive behavior. In L. M. Laosa & I. E. Sigel (Eds.), Families - Research and Practice (Vol. 1): Families as learning environments for children, pp. 47-86. New York: Plenum.

Sigel, I.E. & McGillicuddy-Delisi, A.V. (1984). Parents as teachers of their children: A distancing behavior model. In A. D. Pellegrini & T. D. Yawkey (Eds.), The development of oral and written language in social contexts (pp. 71-92). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Snow, C. E. (1983). Literacy and language: Relationships during the preschool years. Harvard Educational Review, 53(2), 165-189.

Snow, C. (1991). The theoretical basis for relationships between language and literacy development. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 6(1), 5-10.

Snow, C. E., Barnes, W. S., Chandler, J., Hemphill, L., and Goodman, I. F. (1991). Unfulfilled expectations: Home and school influences on literacy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Snow, C. E. & Kurland, B.F. (1996). Sticking to the point: Talk about magnets as a context for engaging in scientific discourse. In D. Hicks (Ed.), Child discourse and social learning: An interdisciplinary perspective (pp. 189-220). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tabors, P.O. (1995). Coding manual for toy play fantasy world talk. Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University.

Tabors, P. & Beals, D. (December, 1993). Learning new words from books: Context or Conversation? Paper presented at the annual meetings of the National Reading Conference, Charleston, South Carolina.

Author Note

I would like to thank Patton Tabors for ongoing generative discussions about the direction and potential of this work, for collaboration on earlier rare word studies. Thanks to Anne Robyns, Cornelius Heise-Baigorria, Linda Caswell, and Jane Katz for coding the toy play transcripts. Special thanks to the families who allowed the Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development to visit their homes, to all the researchers on the project who have contributed to this work (especially Catherine Snow and David Dickinson), to the Ford Foundation, Spencer Foundation, who funded the Home-School Study, and to the University of Tulsa for a research grant to complete this project.

Table 1
Number of Transcripts Collected in Home Visit Situations and Number of Rare Word Types Found in Each Setting

Situation	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Total
Toy play	83	71	69	223
Mealtime	64	45	51	160

Table 2
Mean Percentage of Extended Discourse found in each setting (s.d.)

Extended Discourse Genre	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5
Toy Play Fantasy World	38.0 (18.8)	43.4 (19.6)	32.9 (17.3)
Mealtime Explanatory	15.0 (9.4)	16.3 (10.6)	13.6 (7.2)
Mealtime Narrative	16.9 (14.8)	11.7 (10.0)	15.8 (13.6)

Table 3
Results - Toy Play Fantasy World Talk:
Mean Frequencies of Rare Word Use and Utterances, and Ratios (s.d.)

Age	n	Rare Words	Utterances	Rare Word/ Utt. Ratio	F	p
3	83					
	full	8.4	329.4	.025		
		(8.4)	(166.6)	(.022)	0.80 (1,82)	.374
	FW	4.2	131.5	.028		
		(6.2)	(106.6)	(.035)		
4	71					
	full	10.6	253.9	.042		
		(8.3)	(109.2)	(.031)	6.55* (1,70)	.013
	FW	5.8	118.4	.050		
		(5.9)	(83.9)	(.041)		
5	69					
	full	9.6	232.7	.042		
		(7.0)	(89.8)	(.030)	2.30 (1,67)	.134
	FW	2.4	83.3	.034		
		(3.1)	(59.8)	(.049)		

* difference is statistically significant

Table 4
Results - Mealtime Explanatory Talk:
Mean Frequencies of Rare Word Use and Utterances, and Ratios (S.D.)

Age	n	Rare Words	Utterances	Rare Word/ Utt. Ratio	F	p
3	64					
	full	33.1	396.1	.077		
		(29.9)	(248.4)	(.044)	5.60* (1,63)	.021
	EXP	8.0	66.0	.104		
		(11.0)	(62.3)	(.110)		
4	45					
	full	35.9	417.4	.086		
		(25.5)	(229.4)	(.044)	9.69* (1,43)	.003
	EXP	8.8	63.9	.123		
		(8.5)	(43.6)	(.098)		
5	51					
	full	41.2	442.7	.085		
		(32.5)	(231.9)	(.048)	9.98*(1,48)	.003
	EXP	9.1	68.0	.125		
		(11.1)	(57.7)	(.113)		

* difference is statistically significant

Table 5
Results - Mealtime Narrative Talk:
Mean Frequencies of Rare Word Use and Utterances, and Ratios (S.D.)

Age	n	Rare Words	Utterances	Rare Word/ Utt. Ratio	F	p
3	64					
	full	33.1	396.1	.077		
		(29.9)	(248.4)	(.044)	1.03 (1,53)	.315
	NAR	6.9	76.9	.096		
		(9.5)	(88.6)	(.099)		
4	45					
	full	35.9	417.4	.086		
		(25.5)	(229.4)	(.044)	2.30 (1, 34)	.139
	NAR	6.1	54.2	.104		
		(9.4)	(51.5)	(.081)		
5	51					
	full	41.2	442.7	.085		
		(32.5)	(231.9)	(.048)	2.01 (1,45)	.164
	NAR	8.2	70.3	.099		
		(13.1)	(67.5)	(.094)		